

CHARLES MONTGOMERY

Summary: Charles Montgomery discusses his career on the waterfront, from longshoreman to President of the Clerks and Checkers Union. He talks about the lack of training at the waterfront, automation leading to dwindling man hours and the accepted pecking order.

ILA Local 1351

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ILA OFFICES, Clearlake City

01:13

President, Local 1351, clerks and checkers. Started in 1968. Stepfather was a foreman. Worked on mother's social security number for some time. Started throwing bags and rolling cotton and other general foreman work. ILA nepotism has always been prevalent. Finished high school and continued to work. IN 1971, friend introduced to checkers. Was drafted in 1971. Military time lasted till 1973. Came back to work as a clerk and checker. 1974 - went from working every day to working once every month. 77 economy turned around and Democrats took over. Domestic policy was good. Changed jobs. Clerk and checker. No training. Import marks. People taught on the job. Learnt to create locations within the warehouse, cross reference.

10:31

Still receive a lot of cargo that is break bulk. Also will take cargo from a container out and spread it out so it easy for distribution. Everything has a distinguishing identification mark. Need a packing list from the manufacture detailing the correct information. Like address on a letter. Used pretty rudimentary equipment back then. Fork lifts were a popular item, sophisticated gear for lifting was just being introduced. Got in during a technological evolution. in 1977, Port of Houston opened the first fully automated container terminal - Barber's Cut. Opportunity for younger men to get into working at the Port as older men did not feel comfortable working with containers. Moved into a container yard around 1977 and worked for two years and learnt all about containers - nomenclature, how it operates, stowage etc. Then became clerk for container ships. Never had a problem with jobs after that. Stayed in container related jobs till 1990. Moved to Port Authority and started working on their container yard. Great technological improvements related to handling containers. Sophisticated equipment from forklifts with short blades and 5000 lifting capacity to 90,000 lb. forklift to overhead cranes. 2005 became president of clerks and checkers, have worked in career as clerk and checker and longshoreman in every type of job available at the waterfront. Grazing the job. Well rounded organization.

19:36

in 1990 - recognized the shortcoming of lack of training for the job. Only criteria for hiring was a strong back. in 1971 failed miserably as a checker. Was taught the ropes by someone. Why no training? Became stevedore of clerks in 1990, sent a letter to local 1351 asking for classes to train checkers and clerks. Taught a few classes in 1995. Held classes at the Union hall with visual aids.

President in 2005. Hiring spree. 372 people in 36 months. Instituted a training policy. mandatory 12 hr training class. Those trained are in high demand and are in key positions today. Have knowledge of what to do before they go for the job. Makes for a healthy industry. Highlights Houston. Raised standard on hiring. Navigation of keyboard, typing speed. Basic math tests. Raising calibre of person being hired. Ha made contract negotiations easier.

26:03

109 day strike. People walked picket. Went back to work in 1968 and there was a lot of business. Next event was in the 70s for wage increase. Back then negotiated wage increase was for a nickel or a dime an hour. 1977 strike relegated to containers. Working to get the 50 mile rule instituted. Anything manufactured within 50 miles of the port had to be stuffed and stripped only by ILA employees. Was successful for a brief period. Overturned in 1983. Starting seeing the beginnings of non union competition. some non union companies tried to unload cargo on union docks. There was cargo being delivered for loading by non union, cargo and Equipment was destroyed, people were hurt. Quit being adversarial and just started working on a situation that was amicable for both sides.

35:56

Operate in all public docks. North Turning Basin area. City docks 8-32. Barber's Cut and Bayport. Union operates and runs docks. Workable arrangement. non union - privately owned Manchester terminal, Greensport and publicly owned Central Port. Non union do not fully automated cargo. Active only in break bulk area. Do work with some containers but do not use the same technological advances used by union workers. Fully automated work.

41:41

Was happy being a "soldier", had more leisure time. In the 80s, participated in the labor unrest, appreciated policy and work of union. More progressive than business minded. Ran for Locals Contract Committee. Negotiating styles. Read books, listened to contract negotiations, watched movies. Sat on the contract committee through 1990.

48:30

Pay and benefits of non union do not rival those of the union. Just short of union. Benefit program at the ILA is very good. Makes for a better community. health benefits, retirement plan bonuses throughout the year based on work performed. Cannot beat the

non union and did not want to join them. Went out and hired some non union people into the ILA. No stoppage of work (strike) since 1977.

52:38

Business based on world economy. Takes two or three months for the orders to trickle down at the Port. In good economy Sept, Oct are busy months because of pre christmas. Now, Containers are floating warehouses. Houston is a large oil and gas port and is also the center for manufacturing oil and gas products and oil and gas expiration equipment. Deep water drilling and land drilling, huge influx in pipe, all country pipe. Business in the summer are slow. Things start getting busy in the fall. Now all predicated on world economics.

57:40

Advances in technology is the next big thing that is going to be detrimental to manpower of "man hours." Hardware and software business to try and adapt computer programs to do regular work. Optical character recognition (OCR) -to read the container numbers. There are programs that interface with yard locations, one to locate any container in any yard, program that knows all available spaces on a ship. Eliminates humans completely. Will displace longshoreman of a particular rank.

(TAPE ENDS at 1:00:19)

Tape 2

00:20 (Talking of changes for longshoreman)

Technological advancements that will replace jobs done by human beings. in the 70s, Port of Houston had 10 million man hours a year. After containerization, low of under 4 million man hours a year between 1977 - 2005. 70s created container royalty rule. Helped offset the loss of man hours. Reward someone to work on containers, like a tax put on every container that is unloaded. Paid to the working men. Once a year bonus. Strange thing is that the container royalty check is received by those people that are still working now and not by those who were put out of work by containerization.

04:50

Attrition ratio is much lower now than ever. Large exodus in 1983 when there was a merger of the locals. Houston had segregated locals. 1983 merged together. Lot of men from all ethnicity decided to retire instead of merging. Then in 1986-89 next lot left because of the evolution of containerization. Big hurdle as a labor leader.

09:10

ILA clerks and checkers, warehousemen and longshoreman. 6 ILA locals. Port of Houston employees, police officers assoc. for Port of Houston, small clerks and checkers

office workers local and linesman locals. Longshoreman handle all the vessel work. Warehousemen handle all the ground transportation.

11:10

Pecking order - Longshoreman, warehouseman, clerks and checkers. No work at the longshore hall (Local 24) would create a ripple effect to the warehouse local and the clerks and checkers local.

At Local 24, being a walking foreman or a crane operator are ideal positions. Pile man - was prime position. Job was to make ice water for the workers. 1981, negotiated that position away. At Local 28 - warehouseman's hall, ideal jobs would be walking foreman for Port authority or crane operator. Chief of clerks, timekeeper.

18:34

Advice. "Dedicated Worker" - similar to a 40 hr week job. No vacation or holiday pay. Dedicated to a company and will work exclusively with that company. Fewer regular jobs now.

22:24

Dedicated workers are obligated to the company. If the company has no work, can come back to hiring hall and find work. If company calls, must come back. Started dedicated worker in 2000. Before that had something similar called "Core Worker."

24:49

Hazing. Lot of fun to come to work at the beginning. More a meeting place for friends and camaraderie. Now not as fun as it used to be.

27:30

Larger than life characters. Sunny Hardin - feared by everyone. Had the face of a bull dog. But the biggest teddy bear. Fred Hanson- big man stature wise. Clerks and checkers local. Bill Hausinger. Jimmy Hill and Frank. Was like on television when they would fight. Buddy Rasberry - was held in high esteem. Started as a longshoreman and made it to the top of the longshore local and eventually President of the District. Many larger than life characters at the Houston Port.

36:25

Today, it is a different type of business and people and society. Better educated than before. some of the quirkiness is missing. Consumed with trying to make a living rather than trying to make a friend. Waterfront had a magnetic quality that draws people to it. Used to play a lot of gambling activities, during slow times of business when could not get a job, would still go down and play card games. Would play Texas Hold em or Knock Poker. Would also play Craps.

